
Your monthly update from Earley St Peter's church: July 2026

1 message

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Your Monthly Update from Earley St Peter's – July 2026



Thought for the month *from the Rev'd Dr Kajsa Longuère*

Learning from Dr Evil: on God and suffering

I'm sure you can't resist at article with that title – and I can't wait to tell you about Dr Evil or the Rev'd Dr Michael Lloyd – the Principal of Wycliffe Hall (a Theological College in Oxford), who did his PhD on evil (the problem of). Not at all evil himself, he spoke at the Apologetics training module that I attended a few weeks ago.

Apologetics is the badly-named discipline of defending a position, in this case Christianity. It's fascinating, especially given the number of times I'm questioned about how God can let suffering happen. War in Ukraine and Iran, the death of loved ones and children, and traumatic experiences,

we are experiencing and witnessing a lot of suffering. We are also told that God is a good God who loves us all. I can see how that can sound like a paradox.

To try to make sense of this, we need to decide on a few points that will be very philosophical, and I can only speak for myself of course. I am absolutely convinced of God's goodness and omnipotence, despite the evil in this world. He is all good, and all powerful. It's a stance that in the philosophy of religion is called theodicy (if you're up for a bit of jargon). It comes from the teachings of St Augustine of Hippo, who attributes suffering to the misuse of human and angelic free will (we call it 'the Fall'). Yes, I do absolutely believe in a spiritual level (that goes beyond our human understanding and scientific methods) where there are angels.

I believe that something went wrong on a spiritual level, which has caused suffering in our dimension of creation. But thanks to Darwin-inspired modern science, I think we need to accept that suffering took place before humans populated the earth. There was suffering in the natural world before Adam and Eve, but there wasn't anyone there to write about it. If you want to debate Darwin's theories, let me know. Dr Evil, or Michael Lloyd, and I agree on this point it seems. So, what happened? Well, your guess is as good as mine, but I'll give you what I've found in the Bible (often a good source to go to).

Genesis 1:28, for instance, tells us *"God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'"* "Subdue it" – something had to be subdued. That doesn't sound like creation having gone according to God's plan, not entirely. Adam and Eve were made to look after an already existing world.

The fall of the angels come up in Isaiah 14:12-15 where the Day Star (son of Dawn) wanted to make themselves like God and was brought down to hell, and in the second letter of Peter, 2 Peter 2:4-6 we are told how God didn't spare the angels when they sinned. I am inclined to agree with C. S. Lewis, in his book *The Problem of Pain*, where he speculates that the angelic fall caused corruption in the physical world before humans even existed. Michael Lloyd's own words echoed Lewis' in that he claims that the integration between the spiritual and physical worlds was integrated so substantially at creation that the disruption in the

spiritual world ended up affecting the physical world and thus dislocating the creation process. Humans needed to put right what had gone wrong by tending the earth and subduing it, but instead of fixing the problem they became a part of it. Theologically, God is not the maker of pain and suffering, and pastorally, what we go through isn't of his invention.

Angels – or heavenly beings, are a bit higher than us humans (Psalm 8:4-8 and Hebrews 2:7-9), or rather we are a bit lower than the Angels. Jesus took on human flesh temporarily so that he could experience suffering and death for the redemption of humanity, and consequently God could experience suffering and death (Hebrews 2:7-9). You could also say that God came pastorally through Jesus, and Jesus had a lot to say about suffering – nothing which would indicate that either God or Jesus himself would want suffering to exist. So, if God didn't want suffering, why does it happen? As is very human of us, we try to find the one who is at fault – which is possibly why the Doctrine of the Fall (Adam + Eve + Serpent) exists.

A new relationship was formed, through Jesus, a relationship of hope. For if suffering wasn't intended, it can be done away with, can't it? Through the Kingdom – the Kingdom of God that came in through Jesus, thorough which God's broken sovereignty is being restored. It is now up to us to decide what we do with the freedom that was given us to. The freedom to make choices, without God interfering (because that wouldn't be freedom). That freedom that makes love possible as we are people, not machines. But if Angels, who are higher beings, can be corrupted, then so can we, lower beings. While we can choose to cause suffering by turning away from God, we can also choose to put God in the middle of our existence and, thereby, choose salvation. God, who is a good God, really wants us to choose the latter.

When "bad stuff" happens, God is angry about it. We need to be able to say that. Like any parent, God is angry at his child or other part of creation for making "bad stuff" happen and mourns with and wants to console his child that is suffering. If you are the latter child, I hope that you know that God knows and sees all and that he is the one to pass judgement on his own terms. If you can, I hope you feel that you can leave judgement to him, and that you will open your arms to his embrace and love. He is righteous, but he didn't want any of that "bad stuff" to happen to you. Of course, there is suffering where nobody can be personally blamed, like my mother's dementia, or a child suffering from

cancer. God is upset about that too, and it was not part of the plan at all. Molecular accidents, such as mutation in cell replication or other causes for cancer don't happen on his orders (it's not vengeance or a personal punishment either). He wouldn't be a good God if they did. He wants to be there to comfort you in your grief, if you let him.

There is a rather wonderful book written by Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize winner, Archbishop of Cape Town, and Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that aimed to ensure a non-violent transition of power following the fall of Apartheid. In the book, Tutu outlines the case for forgiveness, and the need for us to be able to forgive, but he also underlines that forgiving isn't the same as forgetting. I have taken a lot of comfort and learning from that wonderful book over the years, forgiving some seriously "bad stuff", and though I am not forgetting – heavy weights have been lifted off my shoulders as I have left some of his children for him to judge on his own terms, and moved ahead with my life. So please put God in the middle, and the world will be a little less evil, and a bit more the way he intended it.

So, here's my theodicy, and I hope it is giving you some food for thought. How I wish I had chosen a cool PhD topic though, like Dr Evil.

If you want to read any of the books that I'm referring to or used to prepare this article:

Lewis, C.S. (1940). *The Problem of Pain*. Whitefriars Press. London.

Southgate, C. et al. (2025). *God, struggle, and suffering in the evolution of life*. T&T Clark. London.

Tutu, D. (1999). *No future without forgiveness*. Rider. London.

From the vicar

We had much to celebrate in June and I'm still collecting photographs of various events, which will appear in next month's newsletter.

We offered our thanks to Libby, as she steps back from formal ministry (you can read a letter from Libby later in this newsletter). We said congratulations to Kajsa, who is now a priest, and many of us attended her ordination service. We also congratulated Anthan, who was formally received into the Church of England, and presented medals to four of our choristers. We welcomed Bishop Mary for our Patronal Festival and we

said goodbye to Madhuri, as she prepares to be ordained and begin her curacy.

I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who contributed to any of these events and special services. It was truly a team effort and it is a delight to have so much to celebrate and be thankful for.

Kate

Services and Events in July

(the information below is also available via My ChurchSuite and our website)

We meet every weekday morning at 8.55am (Fridays at 8.30am) in the church for Morning Prayer. All welcome.

Wednesday 1 July	9am	Church open
	10am	Tots and Teddies
Friday 3 July	1pm	Wedding of Samantha Sharp and Joe Pringle
Saturday 4 July	10am-2pm	Church open
Sunday 5 July	8am	Holy Communion
	10am	Bread and Wine

	6.30pm	Evening worship Questions and Cake
Monday 6 July	9am	Church open
	2pm	Sunshine Social
Tuesday 7 July	9am	Church open
	11am	Holy Communion
Wednesday 8 July	9am	Church open
	10.15am	Tots & Teddies
	1pm	Start! course
Thursday 9 July	10am	Thursday@10 - Coffee and chat
Friday 10 July	9.30am	Church cleaning
Saturday 11 July	10am- 3pm	Church open

Sunday 12 July	10am	Parish Communion Children's Church Inspiration Group
	6.30pm	Choral Evensong with Song School
Monday 13 July	9am	Church open
	7.30pm	PCC
Tuesday 14 July	9am	Church open
	11am	Holy Communion
	1pm	Start! course
Wednesday 15 July	9am	Church open
	10.15am	Tots & Teddies
Saturday 18 July	10am- 3pm	Church open
	10am	Parish Prayer Walk (see below)
Sunday 19 July	10am	Parish Communion with Song School

		Children's Church Inspiration Group
	6.30pm	Reflective Communion Questions and Cake
Tuesday 21 July	11am	Holy Communion
Wednesday 22 July	9am	Church open
	1pm	Start! course
Thursday 23 July	10am	Thursday@10
Saturday 25 July	10am- 3pm	Church open
Sunday 26 July	10am	Parish Communion Children's Church
	11.30am	Christmas Fayre planning meeting
	4pm	Messy Church
	6.30pm	Choral Evensong
Monday 27 July	9am	Church open
Tuesday 28 July	9am	Church open

	11am	Holy Communion
Wednesday 29 July	9am	Church open

Parish Prayer Walks

Kajsa has developed Parish Prayer Walks – 1-10km walks around the parish with prayer stations and set prayers that may (or may not) be used. You will find the links to download maps on the flyer outside the hall or in church, and paper copies of the maps are to be found in the green folder in the church's library corner. We will do a joint walk (most likely the University walk) on the third Saturday of the month, at 10am, meeting by the church. The walk will be followed by a coffee/tea and biscuits in the church. Toilets and parking are available at the church hall. Please note that there will not be a joint walk in August.

Sunshine Social: the next session will be on 6 July at 2pm. There will not be a session in August.

From the Revd Libby Newman:

Dear friends,

After much prayer and talking it over with colleagues, family and friends I have decided I wish to step back from Ministerial duties, hang up my dog collar as it were, as of 29 June this year. Various health problems and the attendant medication mean that my energy levels seem to be much diminished, so everything is becoming more stressful. I would rather stop whilst people find what I can offer as a priest is helpful, than press on and at some point then fail you, my God and myself.

It's been a very difficult decision to make, but I'm sure it is the right one. I'm deeply appreciative of the warmth and kindness I've experienced from all at St Peter's in these last several years. Also, a very big thank you to Kate for welcoming me into the Ministerial Team at St Peter's, of which it's been a privilege to a part, and for the support she's given me. For all of us, lay or ordained, discipleship is at the heart of our journey of faith. Starting in July, my journey of faith will continue in the pews of St

Peter's and at St Nicolas, which was a significant part of my life for many years. God bless you.

With love, *Libby*

Learning Hub

"The books transported her into new worlds..." (Matilda)

Learning is something we do throughout our lives and as Christians there is always more to learn, about God, the Bible and the Church. Study courses are great but sometimes it is good to learn at our own pace, and Oxford Diocese have a great platform for this called the Learning Hub. It is free to create an account and then you can access a range of courses, including some short 'bite size' courses which can be completed in just a couple of hours at your own pace (and you can spread the time over a few days or weeks).

Please read this file [Learning hub.docx](#) which is a poster I have made showing you how to create your account and which courses might be a good starting point. If you'd like to chat about any of the courses or need help signing up then please do email me.

Kate

Friends of Amani Tanzania: Thank you to everyone for the fundraising efforts in Lent, which allowed the purchase of four more bicycles for evangelists in Shinyanga. Bridget and Leslie Green are visiting the Diocese of Shinyanga in July. Please see the latest news here:

[FOAT Charity Visit 2026 - Shinyanga.pdf](#)

Support for Anthan: Anthan is a Catholic Priest from Pakistan who was ordained 17 years ago and has spent all of his adult life either in theological training or ordained ministry. Due to a series of challenging circumstances, Anthan came to the UK 18 months ago and first worshipped at St Peter's just a few days after arriving in the country. Since then he has become a regular congregation member on Sundays and Tuesdays, and regularly volunteers in the church hall. More recently, he has been on the rota for reading and prayers in church, and his prayerful presence has been a blessing to many in our church community.

Sadly, Anthan's initial asylum claim was rejected on the grounds that the Home Office did not believe he was a priest. This was very disappointing as Anthan has a significant online presence from his time ministering in

Pakistan and further to this, there is an official record of his ordination which can be easily accessed. Alongside my letter to support his appeal, the Bishop of Oxford also wrote in support of Anthan and he is still awaiting the appeal decision. Just before Easter, Anthan received notification that he was being re-housed to the East Midlands with only 15 days' notice, which was distressing news. Not only does he have friends and support through our church, he is also part way through a college course and has a voluntary job in a local charity shop. The first few months in Reading were incredibly challenging as Anthan did not know anyone and to suddenly be moved, after working so hard to build his life back up here, would be very detrimental to Anthan's wellbeing.

The good news is that, again with Diocesan support, Anthan is allowed to stay in the area but no longer has accommodation provided by the Home Office. We have found a room for him which is safe and comfortable, but this is a temporary measure which we had to organise quickly, as Anthan would have been homeless after his previous accommodation ended. We are asking whether anyone would be able to offer Anthan a longer term room to stay in while his appeal is being processed. The allowance he receives would mean he is not able to pay a large amount of rent but he would have enough money to contribute towards food etc and will be looking for paid employment once his course has finished. Please could I encourage everyone to pray that accommodation is found for Anthan that is close enough to church that he can continue to volunteer and attend regularly. *Kate*

Team meetings and Christmas Fayre

In May, we held several meetings on Sunday mornings, with the hope of creating or re-establishing some key teams within the church. I am delighted that the Hospitality meeting was a great success and a Hospitality Committee was formed, more details of which will follow.

The Eco meeting was also productive, although we do need more people to join this committee, which will meet every 2 months. Sarah Godwin is our new 'Eco Officer', working with me, the Ministry Team and the PCC as we look at how we can work towards a Bronze 'Eco Church' award. If you would like to be part of this team, which is focussing on a key area of church life that the Diocese is strongly encouraging, please email me for more details. We would also welcome any young people to this committee and would make sure we met at times that were suitable.

We also had an initial Christmas Fayre meeting, which was also well

attended and where people offered some great ideas. The Fayre will be on Friday 11 December from 3-7pm. We don't want the timing/dark evenings to put people off, so we will be organising transport to and from the hall for anyone who needs it, and we will come off ample parking for those with limited mobility. Of the people present at the meeting, we had volunteers for various contributions to the Fayre, either in preparation or on the day, some stalls were decided, including

- Secondhand books
- Mulled wine
- Handmade stall (see separate notice below)
- Christmas card stall designed by Kajsa
- Tombola
- Guess weight of cake
- Traditional games such as 'splat a rat', 'guess how many sweets in the jar' and 'Guess name of the bear' on a table run by our young people
- Upstairs children's craft and activities, probably in the Fowler Room
- Santa's grotto in the Paddock Room

Kajsa has offered to decorate and we are very fortunate to benefit from her artistic skills and past experience in decorating for a Christmas Fayre.

There are some teams/roles that we need volunteers for including:

- Kitchen team
- hot drinks and cakes. On the day and baking!
- Santa's helpers
- wrapping in advance and helping on the day, in shifts
- on the door
- setting up team and tidying away team, who may or may not be there during the Fayre

Please can you let me know directly if you'd be happy to volunteer or take a lead in organising any of those. *Kate*

Hand-made stall

Are you crafty? Can you knit or crochet? Do you work with wood or clay? At our Christmas Fayre, we are having a 'Hand-made' stall which will hopefully contain a wide variety of items. Some ideas so far are hats, scarves, Christmas tree decorations and jewellery, but we know that people are very creative and we would welcome a range of items to sell. We ask that most items are £10 or below and small enough to be taken home on the day. However, if you have any suggestions for larger or more expensive items, please speak to Kate as this might be possible.

Rachel Knight will be overseeing this stall. If you would like to contribute to this stall, please email Kate or come to the next meeting. We also ask that we don't have home-made Christmas cards contributed as Kajsa is designing some specifically for the church to sell from November onwards, and they will have their own small stall at the fayre.

Pastoral support: Our pastoral team will be happy to hear if you, or anybody you know, would welcome a phone call or visit. Please contact the parish office (0118 966 8575) or Mary Brooke (0118 926 2153)

Woodley Food Bank donations: Thank you for all your support to our local food bank with donations of tins, cartons, dried goods with a long shelf life and also the ever important personal hygiene items. Please donate if you are able in the box at the back of the church. Our continued support is still very much needed. *Anne and Ken Richardson*



More information here: www.woodleyfoodbank.org

Life in all its fullness

There are exciting social, training and study events coming this year. We look forward to welcoming everyone. Check the dates below and sign up, either via My ChurchSuite or by contacting the parish office. More dates are likely to be added, so [check the church calendar](#) and newsletters for latest information.

20 September: Social - MacMillan Coffee Morning

7 November: Training - Neurodiversity Awareness

28 November: Study - Gospel of Mark

11 December: Social - Christmas Fayre

Dates for your diary

16 August, 4-5.30pm: Messy Church Fundraiser. Solve our three adventures with puzzles, craft activities and snacks! £5 per person, with money raised to go towards resources for Messy Church. [Sign up here](#) or contact john@earleystpeters.org.uk

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